

# **HARKIN INITIATIVES BOOST NUTRITION, ENCOURAGE EXERCISE TO COMBAT CHILDHOOD OBESITY**

*"Poor diet and physical inactivity are contributing to growing rates of chronic disease in the United States. In fact, research suggests that one-third of American children born today will develop type II diabetes and at the same time, rates of obesity among children are skyrocketing. This is a trend that we can and must reverse by boosting childhood nutrition and increasing physical activity."*

**-Tom Harkin (D-IA), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee**

## **Key Harkin Initiatives Aimed at Fighting Childhood Obesity:**

### **Health Care Reform**

Harkin pressed for key insurance reform provisions in the Senate that would eliminate copays and deductibles for preventive services. In addition, Harkin championed health improvements in communities as well as medical settings. The Prevention and Public Health title of health care reform includes funding for community prevention programs that encourage physical activity, good nutrition and the reduction of tobacco use, making it easier for individuals to make healthy choices.

### **FIT Kids Act**

Harkin introduced the *Fitness Integrated with Teaching Kids Act*, or *FIT Kids Act*, to amend the *No Child Left Behind Act* to support physical education for all public school children through grade 12, and to ensure that they are taught essential health and nutritional information.

### **The PLAY Every Day Act**

Harkin introduced the *Promoting Lifelong Active Youth Every Day Act*, or *PLAY Every Day Act* to help promote the national recommendation of physical activity to kids, families and communities across the country. This bill supports the development of a well-validated community assessment tool, the "community play index," that measures the policy, program or environmental barriers in communities to youth participating in physical activity. In addition, the legislation assists coalitions in using the "community play index" to craft plans that promote physical activity and wellness in communities.

### **Food Marketing to Children**

Harkin has repeatedly pressed the food industry to adopt uniform, system-wide, age-appropriate guidelines for marketing to children. Harkin formed a FCC Taskforce on Media and Childhood Obesity with Senator Brownback, comprised of representatives from consumer advocacy groups, the food and beverage industry, media companies, and advertisers. Harkin also recently directed the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to establish a Study Commission on Food Marketed to Children to provide recommendations for marketing and labeling of the nutritional quality of foods for children and youth. The FTC is working in cooperation with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in this effort.

### **Federal Taskforce on Childhood Obesity**

To coordinate leadership on federal efforts, Harkin has called for a taskforce on childhood obesity in the Healthy Lifestyles and Prevention (HeLP) America Act of 2007 to prevent and reduce childhood obesity and to promote sound health and nutrition among American children.

### **Food Advertising in Schools**

Harkin has pushed provisions to give the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to prohibit the advertising of food in schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program if the Secretary determines that the consumption of the advertised food has a detrimental effect on the diets or health of children

### **Update School Nutrition Standards Programs**

Harkin has introduced legislation that would improve student health by updating decades-old nutrition standards in schools. Currently, more than \$11 billion in federal money is invested annually in student health through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. However, the USDA has little authority over what can be sold to students outside of these programs. Harkin's legislation would allow the Secretary of Agriculture, through established notice and comment procedures, to establish common-sense nutrition standards for the foods and beverages that are sold in school vending machines and similar outlets.

### **School Wellness Policies**

Senator Harkin co-authored a provision in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 requiring that schools develop local wellness policies to improve students' nutrition and health. The policies must include goals for physical education and nutrition education, and also set guidelines for the sale and availability of all foods at school, including foods made available through vending machines, school snack bars, and a la carte lines.

### **The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program**

As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, Harkin shaped the 2008 farm bill to include a tremendous expansion of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, which provides free fresh fruits and vegetables to low-income children in schools. Over the next ten years, \$1 billion will be invested in this initiative, which will allow it to serve as many as 3 million low-income children. Harkin first introduced this program in the 2002 farm bill. The farm bill also included a provision to encourage the procurement of local fruits and vegetables in school meal programs.

### **Menu Labeling**

Harkin has worked to help parents and children choose better foods at restaurants. Under a new compromise, a restaurant that is part of a chain with 20 or more locations doing business under the same name (other restaurants are exempt) would be required to disclose calories on the menu board. Additionally, information pertaining to total calories and calories from fat, as well as amounts of fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, complex carbohydrates, sugars, dietary fiber and protein must be available to customers in a written form upon request.

### **Improvements to Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs**

As a result of deep cuts to the Food Stamp Program (now renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP) in the mid-1990s, the purchasing power of families' food assistance benefits has eroded greatly over time. Harkin led the effort in the 2008 farm bill to invest significant resources to end that erosion and partially restore benefit levels that have been lost. This will allow parents to purchase more quality, healthful foods for their children. Additionally, the Healthy Incentive Pilot in the SNAP Program will provide increased benefits to SNAP participants who use their benefits for the purchase of healthy foods.

### **Healthy Workforce Act**

Provides tax credits to businesses that offer comprehensive programs to promote employee health and also provides grants for small businesses.

### **Safe and Complete Streets Act**

The *Safe and Complete Streets Act of 2007* was introduced by Senator Harkin to help encourage physical activity by creating more sidewalks and bike paths, and improving pedestrian and bicycle safety. The bill would encourage federal, state, and regional agencies that receive federal transportation funding to incorporate pedestrian and bicycle safety measures when communities are built or modernized.

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